

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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BUSH ADMINISTRATION PLAYS NUCLEAR ROULETTE WITH RADIATION PROTECTION PILLS

Bush Administration has not yet implemented potassium iodide distribution plan

WASHINGTON, DC - Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), Senior Member of the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Select Committee on Homeland Security today released a letter to President Bush, asking why the potassium iodide distribution plan mandated in the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-188, the Bioterrorism Act) has not been fully implemented.

“We know that al Qaeda is targeting nuclear power plants in the U.S.,” Rep. Markey said. “Potassium iodide, or KI, is a drug that can protect people, especially children and pregnant women, from some harmful radiation in the event of an accident or a terrorist attack on a nuclear plant. It’s cheap and it’s simple, and my amendment to the Bioterrorism Act directed the President to make KI available to any state that asks for it, for people within 20 miles of a nuclear power plant. But the Bush Administration continues to play nuclear roulette with public health and safety by dragging its feet on KI distribution. KI should be available to all people within 20 miles of a nuclear power plant.”

An accident or terrorist attack on a nuclear plant could release large amounts of radioactive iodine. This iodine can be absorbed into the thyroid, causing thyroid cancer, particularly in people under the age of forty. After the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident, thyroid cancer rates in some affected areas rose by a factor of 100. KI pills protect people who take them by flooding their thyroid with non-radioactive iodine. The National Academies recently completed a study of KI, finding that it is “an important agent for protection against thyroid-related health effects of exposure to radioiodine”.

Section 127 (the Markey Amendment) of the Bioterrorism Act directs the President to make KI available to any state that requests it, in sufficient quantities for people living within 20 miles of a nuclear power plant. The President is also directed to prepare guidelines for distributing and using KI within one year of the passage of the Act (June 12, 2002). These guidelines have not yet been prepared, and the federal government currently only makes enough KI available to states to cover people within 10 miles of a nuclear power plant.

Rep. Markey concluded, “The Bush Administration needs to start taking the threat of terrorist attacks on nuclear power plants seriously. Providing KI to everyone living within a 20 mile radius is a necessary first step, and should happen immediately. The Bush Administration should also improve nuclear plant security guard training, create no-fly zones over nuclear plants, maintain basic nuclear plant fire safety standards and upgrade cybersecurity for the computers that operate and monitor nuclear plants.”

Additional information is available at Rep. Markey’s website, <http://www.house.gov/markey>.

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